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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY L, 3RD BATTALION, 106TH INFANTRY
(27TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE BATTLE OF DEATH VALLEY,
SAIPAN, 23 JUNE - 28 JUNE 1944
(WESTERN PACIFIC CAMPAIGN
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

Major Charles H. Hallden, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	4
Initial Landings.....	6
Battalion Relief of Marines.....	7
The Attack.....	9
Analysis and Criticism.....	33
Lessons.....	36
Map A - Initial Landing	
Map B - The Relief - 4th Marine Division	
Map C - Attack through Death Valley	

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company L, 106th Infantry, 27th US Infantry Division in the Battle of Death Valley, Saipan, Marianas Island, 23 June - 28 June 1944, during the offensive of the Western Pacific.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to go back and give a brief resume of the events leading to this operation.

After the conquest of Eniwetok, the High Command decided to continue its attack against the Japs by immediately setting the probable date for the invasion of the Marianas Islands.

There were five reasons why the Command decided to invade the Islands:

1. To pierce one of the most important links in the chain of defenses around Japanesea proper. The headquarters of the Japanese Central Pacific Fleet and its 31st Army was located on Saipan. (1)
2. Coordination in a two prong attack at the heart of Japan - Southwest Pacific forces from the south and Central Pacific forces from the east. (2)
3. Secure air and seaplane bases, in order to make long bomber raids against all parts of the Japanese islands. Aslito Airfield and Tanapag Naval Base were two important objectives. (3)
4. Bases for the Navy - for anchorage, repair and filling stations, in order to continue on an operational basis. A part of the Jap Task Force for the attack on Midway, had been assembled here. (4)
5. To cut into the supply and communication lines from Japan to her forces in the Southwest Pacific. (5)

(1) A-3, p. 1379; (2,3,4,5) A-2, p. 58

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The planning of the Marianas Islands campaign consisted of three parts. The mission of the Fifth Amphibious Corps, consisting of the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions, was to capture Saipan. After securing it, it was to immediately move on to Tinian Island. This unit was commanded by Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, USMC. (6)

The Third Amphibious Corps, composed of the 3rd Marine Division and the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, were to invade Guam upon order, providing the Saipan operation went well. They were commanded by Major General (later Lieutenant General) Roy M. Geiger, USMC. (7)

The US Army, 27th Infantry Division, was to be the reserve for both units and used at either of the three places - Saipan, Tinian or Guam, or wherever they were most needed. (8)

This operation was supported by the US 5th Fleet which also furnished the naval force to transport and land the assault troops. It consisted of one of the largest groups of naval ships up to this time, ranging from LCI's to giant battleships, ^{The 5th Fleet} commanded by Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. (9)

Task Force 17, a part of the 5th Fleet under Vice Admiral Marc C. Mitscher, formed a defense for the fleet which included observation; and air strikes on the Bonin and Volcano Islands in conjunction with the Marine and Army air forces to soften up the Marianas and neutralize the Caroline Islands. (10)

The 27th Infantry Division, when it sailed on 1 June 1944, carried 19 alternate plans for its possible employment. On 9 June at Kwajalein Island, it added three more. No one knew where we would be employed but all RCT's were ready for anything. (11)

Order of priority of planning for the division was Saipan, Tinian and Guam.

(6,7) A-1, p. 8; (8) Personal knowledge; (9) A-2, p. 58; (10) A-2, p. 58; (11) A-1, p. 9.

Saipan was estimated to have an enemy force of approximately 30,000 troops. An island 13 miles long by 5 1/2 miles wide, with a mountain range running down the center, its highest elevation was Mt. Tapotchau, 1554 feet high. This high land was heavily wooded, the terrain extremely rugged with coral-sharp ridges, caves and fissure-like valleys. (12)

Industry - sugar cane constituted the main crop, with fishing the second largest source of income. (13)

Health and Sanitation - poor: no sewage system; wagons were used to remove garbage and refuse, but this service was inadequate; night soil was used as fertilizer; mosquitoes, flies, bugs and fleas were all very numerous. (14)

Prevailing diseases included all of the intestinal disorders, leprosy, and many more infectious diseases. (15)

Other orientations aboard the ship, besides the daily exercises to keep physically fit, included daily conferences of the battalion combat team, to study all phases of the various plans and facilitate close harmony and knowledge of each unit. This included command post exercises, security, signal operation instruction, tank employment and the tactical unity of each element.

L Company had several additional features, ~~in the 3rd Battalion~~. Each rifle platoon squad was equipped with an additional Browning automatic rifle, and each platoon had three additional qualified radio operators trained to take over this job when needed.

All companies in the 3rd Battalion were below their authorized strength for this operation.

The battalion had participated in the "push" across the Pacific Ocean. Its last operation included the initial landing and conquest of Eniwetok, so the men were seasoned combat veterans. (16)

(12) A-2, p. 58; (13) A-2, p. 58; (14,15,16) Personal knowledge.

INITIAL LANDINGS

D day, 15 June 1944, at 0840 US Marines of the Fifth Amphibious Corps charged ashore at the little sugar milling village of Charan-Kanoa on the southwest beaches of Saipan. (See Map A) During the next 25 days there raged on this comparatively small island, one of the most bitter and bloody battles of the Pacific war. (17)

Within 24 hours the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions had established a beachhead at heavy cost. The 27th Infantry Division in transports off Saipan, was ordered shortly after noon 16 June to proceed to Blue Beaches and prepare to disembark. (See Map A) All previous 22 plans were now discarded. (18)

The first elements to go ashore were the 165th Infantry Regiment. They landed and found a great deal of confusion on the beach. The Corps Representative, Major Rock, was finally found and the 165th Infantry received orders to relieve the 24th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, of its sector and capture the O2 line within its zone of action which included Aslito Airfield. (See Map A) This was accomplished that day. (19)

On 17 June other units of the Division came ashore including the Division Artillery, the 762nd Tank Battalion and the 105th Infantry Regiment. The latter immediately went into line taking over the Nafutan Point sector which was very rough terrain - rocky coral pinnacles covered with scrub trees, steep cliffs, and many caves. (See Map A) (20)

On 20 June, the 106th Infantry was ordered to disembark and by nightfall had completed the landing and was placed in Corps Reserve south of Charan Kanoa. (21) On this day Fifth Corps had ordered an attack toward the north in which the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions moved abreast with the 4th Marine Division on the right. The attack proceeded slowly with strong enemy resistance in the vicinity of hill 500. (See Map B) On 22 June

(17) A-3, p. 1379; (18) A-1, p. 9; (19) A-1, p. 10; (20) A-1, p. 10
(21) A-1, p. 11.

they had moved to an area just south of the crest of Mt. Tapotchau. Here, particularly in the 4th Marine Division sector, extremely rough and difficult terrain interfered with the advance. (22)

At 1515 on 22 June General Ralph C. Smith, Commanding the 27th Infantry Division, with his G-3, attended a staff conference with Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, at which General Erskine, Chief of Staff, Fifth Corps, first made known the plans for employment of the 27th Division, ^{which was} to pass through the 4th Marine Division sector with the 23rd Regiment of Marines to cover Kagman Point on its right. (See Map B) The 27th Division commander left at 1700 with sketches and notes of the conference. He met his Regimental Commanders, Colonel Russell G. Ayers, 106th Infantry and Colonel Gerard W. Kelley, 165th Infantry at the Division CP at 1730, one and a half hours before darkness, and completely oriented them on the situation. Colonel Ayers designated the 3rd Battalion as his assault battalion, and by 2100 all company commanders were oriented on the plans for the next morning. (23)

BATTALION RELIEF OF MARINES

The night of 22 - 23 June 1944 was quiet except for a few heavy shells landing just to the Battalion's rear. Troops were up early, eating cold breakfast in the dark and moved out at 0530 in order of march: L Company in the lead followed by K, Battalion Headquarters, M Company and finally I Company. At 0930 L Company arrived in the 4th Marine sector and was directed to the positions dug in on the south side of the road. The company commander thought this odd, and then realized his company was actually ahead of the front lines while affecting the relief. (See Map B) The L Company commander had previously issued instructions to all his platoon leaders and noncommissioned officers to get as much information possible as to situation, terrain and enemy strength from the Marines they were relieving. Meanwhile, the L Company commander contacted the Marine (22) A-2, p. 61; (23) A-7.

company commanders and battalion commander and found he was covering a sector that two Marine companies (L and K, 3rd Battalion, 25th Regiment) with a combined strength of 185 men had just vacated. L Company's strength at this time was approximately 133 men.

The Marine battalion commander recommended to the L Company commander that he hug the cleft through the woods to the front as there were plenty of Japs in the area. He pointed to the activity on the side of Mt. Tapotchau where Japs could be seen running along the side of the mountain into caves. He also stated that Marine Lieutenant Colonel Evans Carlson had just been hit while out with an organized party to rescue a radio operator who was seriously wounded out in front. L Company commander asked him about the line of departure and why it was so far from the map location and his previous instructions. The marine said that it had been pushed back approximately 400 yards by counterattacks the preceding afternoon and night. (24)

A short time later L Company's platoon leaders reported into the company CP stating they were in position and ready for the jump-off at 1000. They also reported the Marines were very thankful to be relieved from this position as it was the strongest resistance encountered by their companies to date. They had tried several times to cross the open ground to their front but had been driven back every time. (25)

To understand the events following, a thorough knowledge of the terrain is essential. Mt. Tapotchau, the peak of a mountain ridge, was in the 2nd Marine Division sector and very heavily defended by the Japs who were well dug in. A provisional Marine battalion attached to the 2nd Marines was assigned the mission of securing it. On the flanks of the mountain peak the ground was unusual. The west side sloped sharply to the sea, the east side dropped in sheer cliffs to a plateau some 600 feet below forming a (24,25) Personal knowledge.

saddle 1200 yards across to a series of hills covered with scrub trees and other heavy foliage. Beyond this the ground sloped down to Kagman Point. This plateau between the cliffs of Mt. Tapotchau and the series of hills made an excellent corridor which became known by the men who fought through it as "Death Valley", and the series of hills on the right was called "Purple Heart Ridge". (See Map C) (26)

THE ATTACK

K Company had not moved in position on L Company's right at H-Hour (1000), so the attack did not start until a little after 1100. No physical contact was made with the 2nd Marine Division on the left due mainly to the sheer cliff on that side. Visual contact could be maintained however. I Company was held in reserve. (27)

L Company's orders were to proceed for about 400 yards then cross over to the right and contact K Company on the right of the battalion. K Company was to proceed forward under cover in column, ^{and} upon entering the wooded area to their front, they were to turn left and contact L Company. Both units would then build up a line before proceeding across the open ground to the objective, a ridge 1800 yards forward at the end of the valley.

Platoon should have been shown
L Company formation: 1st platoon to go through a ravine skirting the left of a hill and meet the balance of the company some 250 yards forward ~~tying~~ in with the 3rd platoon which would go astride a trail on the right. (See Map C) The company headquarters would follow with a squad of engineers carrying flame throwers and demolitions, weapons platoon and 2nd platoon in company reserve. One squad of the 2nd platoon was sent to move up and over the top of the hill to make sure there was no enemy on it. Everything went fine, coordination was achieved on the meeting. The advance continued in columns, when the lead scout of the 3rd platoon saw someone moving away from an ammunition pile just off the trail. As the platoon moved closer they (26) A-1, p. 12; (27) Personal knowledge.

found a Jap ammunition dump in flames, with shells, grenades and mines exploding all over the area. Quick action by the 3rd platoon leader got his men forward of the dump, but the group behind was cut off. The company commander then issued orders for the left platoon to move faster and maintain contact with the 3rd platoon while the rest of the company would follow the 1st platoon to the left. This meant going into terrain that was extremely thick with heavy underbrush over rocky coral alongside of the cliff. Progress was slow but contact was maintained. (See Map C) (28)

The company was now being harassed by scattered enemy fire of several types, particularly the 3rd platoon. Flying shells from the dump were landing all over the area ~~during the movement~~, causing several casualties, and one man was wounded by rifle fire. When the 400 yards had been reached it was decided to move to the right. The 3rd platoon moved in that direction meeting a patrol from K Company. Information from this patrol indicated, that, in order to build up the battalion line, it would be necessary to move the company to the right rear. As the company moved in this direction it came under an intense concentration of small arms fire. A machine gun covered the trail which the unit had to cross. Mortar fire came from the cliff side and front. It became necessary to move by infiltration rushes of one and two men. One man was hit. This move took time, contact with K Company being made about 1530. L Company's area was now in woods in which the enemy had carefully cut the underbrush to create a series of fire lanes causing any movement to be extremely dangerous. Men had to move with utmost caution. 3rd platoon leader William Aue just having finished aligning his platoon with K Company on the right, knelt down beside a rock to light a cigarette when he was hit through the knuckles of his hand.

A short time later, the M Company commander while inspecting his line, slipped into a fire lane and was wounded. The completion of the company's (28) Personal knowledge.

shift to right and its full coordination had taken so much time that it was decided there would be no further forward movement that night. A perimeter was formed in the area completely surrounding a captured Jap ammunition dump in K Company's area.

About 1900 a terrific concentration of mortar fire landed in the company area, wounding six men and causing the rest to dig deeper. Wire contact to the company CP was broken by this fire but radio remained good.

Contact had now been definitely broken with the Marines on the left. The 2nd Battalion, 106th Infantry came in to the line to maintain this contact. G Company hooked up with L Company's left flank. F Company, contacted the Marines, and in order to do this, they had to go to the top of the cliff.

At 1940, just as darkness fell the Japanese launched a tank attack down the road through Death Valley. This road ran directly between K Company and 2nd Battalion, 165th Infantry Regiment positions. The attack was not discovered until the leading vehicle was almost at our lines. Due to the proximity of this leading vehicle, fire could not be placed upon it and therefore it came through the lines along the road. The other five tanks were taken under fire with every weapon available, bazookas, anti-tank guns, and artillery, as well as grenades from grenade launchers. All five tanks were knocked out.

Meanwhile, the one tank that had penetrated the lines proceeded along the road spraying everything as it went with fire from its turret gun and from machine guns. Upon reaching the road junction in the rear of battalion CP, it circled back again toward the front lines, still firing. Just before reaching the line of trees, it again turned around and started back south. One shell from its turret gun accidentally landed in the ammunition dump in K Company area, and within a few moments, this whole dump was exploding in every direction. The tank then moved through the 165th regimental area where it was finally knocked out.

The explosion of the ammunition dump had caused terrific confusion. As the dump began to explode it lit up the area, and the Japanese from the cliff and to the front began throwing mortar shells and intensive machine gun fire all over the area. In the following 20 minutes 12 men were hit in L Company, two mortally wounded and the 10 others less seriously. The company commander now sent Lieutenant Robert Ebersole, Weapon Platoon leader, to take command of the 3rd platoon which had been hit so severely, being nearest to the exploding dump and under a mortar barrage in their area. He reorganized the platoon in the dark by crawling along his whole platoon sector. A squad from the 1st platoon was sent for evacuation of his wounded. They carried or led most of the casualties to the aid station.

Orders were then received to drop back 100 yards and dig in out of the area of exploding ammunition which had made the existing positions untenable. The night was spent with all units very much on the alert and all men very tired. (29)

On 24 June L Company received orders to attack more to the right and east, and knock out the strong point to their right front with the assistance of 3 tanks ^{which} ~~who~~ would report to the company before the attack. ^{They would} Then, continue across the open valley while tanks and self-propelled weapons covered the advance by fire ^{on} the Jap positions in the cliffs. H-Hour was set at 0800, and when the tanks failed to arrive, L Company jumped off without them. It later developed that the tanks in approaching the front lines that morning, came up the road and reported to Captain William Hemmway of K Company. The original plan called for K Company to have two tanks, and L Company 3 tanks in support.

L Company's attack formation was two platoons abreast, 1st and 2nd platoons with machine guns attached, in a skirmish line. Both pushed forward cautiously in an attempt to develop the enemy positions which they knew to be to the front. (29) Personal knowledge.

The whole line crept forward approximately 60 yards with only random shots fired here and there, when Pfc. Thomas A. Menafee, the leading scout in the right platoon, emerged from the woods and came to a huge pile of rocks. Menafee scrambled forward and crawled up and over these rocks. As he jumped down from the pile he found himself practically sitting in the laps of five Japs ^{and} in the middle of a Jap position. Both Menafee and the Japs were extremely surprised although Menafee's approach had awakened a Jap dog which began barking and one of the L Company men shot it. Menafee sat in the position for what seemed to him several minutes and then jumped up and killed three of the Japs with his rifle. He then started scrambling back over the rocks to the rear and as he went he dropped a hand grenade into the lap of a fourth Jap. The fifth enemy soldier managed to throw a grenade himself, and then tried to get away. This grenade went over Menafee's head wounding 3 men behind him, including his platoon sergeant.

The rest of the company placed heavy fire on the whole area to deny it to any enemy who might try to reoccupy it, and began to receive fire in return. L Company commander sent a runner back to find his tanks and the company remained immobile until these vehicles could arrive on the scene to help. Meanwhile, Pfc. Bob T. Brown crawled forward again to attempt to grenade other Jap positions which might be amongst the rocks. As he got up to the position which Menafee had just knocked out he met five Japs coming the other way carrying a light machine gun with them. Brown killed all five Japs.

^{1900 50}
While L Company's right had been running into Menafee's position, the platoon on the left had also stirred up a hornet's nest. The men in this zone had located at least two positions, one containing a 40 mm. gun. The Japs here opened up with everything they had but the fire was largely ineffective. When the tanks finally came they were turned over to Lieutenant Ebersole, the left platoon leader, with instructions to use them against the positions to his front. As Ebersole maneuvered them into position, the

Japs opened up on them with everything they had. This fire came not only from the positions in the immediate vicinity, but from the face of the cliffs along Tapotchau where they had excellent observation of all movement in the valley. One tank received a direct hit on its 75 mm gun tube from one of the guns on the cliff. Another received five hits from mortar shells and one hit from some kind of anti-tank weapon.

Lieutenant Lansford, platoon leader of the tanks with K Company was notified by radio that two of the vehicles in his platoon had been seriously hit and that replacements were needed in L Company. He immediately left K Company with the battalion commander's permission, and reported to L Company after some difficulty in getting through the planted trees and brush. Again the tanks were turned over to Lieutenant Ebersole who had been studying the Jap positions as he lay there pinned down. Ebersole now went over and directed Lansford's vehicles into a position where they could fire at the enemy emplacements. In order to do this it was necessary for Ebersole to expose himself in the midst of the heavy fire which was still falling in the area. Just as the tanks began to move forward slowly, the vehicle beside which the lieutenant was walking received a direct hit by a heavy caliber weapon and fragments from the shell seriously wounded him causing him to fall directly in the path of the second vehicle. A platoon runner dragged him from the path of the vehicle and then carried him back forty yards out of the mortar and artillery fire. Meanwhile, Pfc. Menafee, whose platoon had just finished cleaning up the position he had knocked out, came over and took up the job of directing the tank fire on the front of Ebersole's platoon. Menafee's work was largely ineffective, however, because the hit on the tank had ruined the communications system within the tank. The phone on its back would not work, nor could it contact the other tanks within the platoon. On account of this, the tank platoon leader decided to withdraw again.

Shortly after this, at 1025, L Company commander was notified that the 3rd Battalion would be relieved by the 1st Battalion. He therefore, ordered his men to hold their positions until the relief was effected.

The tremendous artillery and mortar fire that the battalion had been receiving all morning came from the cliffs and front of the battalion area. During this entire action the battalion commander used all available weapons he could muster; battalion weapons, regimental self-propelled weapons, tanks, artillery, even smoke. He had put up a devastating fire in order to neutralize the enemy fire. It had proved ineffective, as the Japs were located in caves and would run their guns out to fire a concentration then move back in. They had excellent observation and could see every movement of our troops. (See Map C) (30)

The pressure from higher headquarters to move against this heavy resistance was illustrated by the 3rd Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harold I. Mizony. He called Captain Heminway, of K Company to him and said, "Bill, I hate to do it, but I've got to send you out there". Bill Heminway replied, "Don't apologize, Hi - I know how it is". Then he straightened up and stuck out his hand saying, "So long, Hi. It's damned nice knowing you". Fifteen minutes later Bill Heminway was dead and along with him some seventeen others of his company who had confidence in him and their other higher leaders. (31)

There were an even hundred casualties in the 2 1/2 hours of fighting in the battalion that morning. (32)

The extreme pressure exerted on the division and in turn on the battalion during the past few days, can be discerned from the fact that the elements of both Marine Divisions were meeting little or no opposition. As they moved farther and farther ahead the weight against the 27th Division down to the battalion became heavier. As a result of this a formation similar

(30) Personal knowledge; (31) A-1, p. 13; (32) Personal knowledge and notes of Captain Edmund Love.

to a V was now existing. (33)

During the entire day of action 24 June, Major General Ralph C. Smith was at the front line keeping in touch with every phase of the critical situation. With his front line riflemen and small unit commanders, he studied and tried to solve the terrain puzzle in the area. It became evident that to push forward in a frontal attack, without cleaning the Japs off the cliff side which infiladed the valley, would mean a heavy cost in lives.

It was decided to maneuver one battalion around the right flank through the 165th regimental area and attack the eastern ridge from that side isolating these key cliff positions. (34)

Plan of action for the 25 June, after a late change, called for the 106th Infantry to move out at 0630 with the 1st and 3rd Battalions. From the area at the bottom of Death Valley these two battalions were to move around the right of Purple Heart Ridge to Chatcha Village and then turn northwest along the road through the hills and build up a line, thus cutting off or isolating the strongpoint in the valley. The execution of the maneuver was assigned to the 1st and 3rd Battalions by Colonel Ayers, 106th Infantry Commander. The 1st Battalion was to lead, the 3rd to follow, in column. The 2nd Battalion, was to extend its lines to the right covering the entrance to the valley, relieving the 1st Battalion, and was then to stage a holding attack north through Death Valley, joining the remainder of the regiment at the upper end. (See Map C) (35)

L Company was the leading company of the 3rd Battalion when it arrived at Chatcha Village. It moved off the road awaiting orders to follow the 1st Battalion in their attempt to cut through the ridge. The 1st Battalion found the going real tough, advancing slowly under artillery fire until their movement was stopped by the heavy Jap resistance. All efforts to get (33,34) A-1, p. 12; (35) A-1, p. 13.

through failed while suffering heavy casualties. Sometime later, after a change in plans, it was decided to send the 3rd Battalion back to Death Valley for a night bivouac at the foot of the valley. (See Map C)

The 26 June plan called for the 3rd Battalion to push along the inside slope of Purple Heart Ridge as far as Hill ~~King~~ and build up a line there, then, if opposition was not too strong, to push on to the regimental objective.

L Company moved out at 0600 with the 1st platoon leading, followed in column by the rest of the company, then I Company, Battalion Headquarters, M and K Companies in that order, over the rugged terrain.

By 1020 the leading platoon had reached the top of Hill Oboe and had started down into the saddle between there and Hill King. (See Map C) Before attempting to take the next hill however, the company commander sent out patrols to his front to explore the approaches. Up to this time the company had run into little trouble - I Company had several wounded including the commanding officer. After a short wait, they followed the patrols and as L Company moved forward a message came in saying that G Company, 165th Infantry, was atop of Hill King. Then one of the patrols surprised a sizable number of Japs, opened fire on them, and became involved in a heavy fire fight. It soon became apparent that this patrol had run into a large Jap force. The combat patrol built up a line near the saddle between Hills Oboe and King to prevent any enemy break through. The company in the meantime had moved along faster after hearing the sudden heavy firing toward their immediate front. The L Company commander saw what appeared to be an ideal strong point encompassing the whole hill. This puzzled the company commander because he had been told that G Company, 165th Infantry was at the top of the hill. He therefore ordered 2nd Lieutenant Wilbert Turpin, in command of his 2nd platoon, to go out with a squad to the right and see if he could find G Company. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Mizony at the battalion, also having information that G Company was on Hill King, told L Company's

commanding officer to have his men cease their fire so that they wouldn't hit our own troops.

L Company commander now moved his 2nd platoon, less one squad, around the right flank of the leading platoon to outflank the Jap position from the rear. He also thought that perhaps G Company of the 165th Infantry might be on the east slope of the hill and that this was a position designed to defend the valley. He thought that by passing the squads around the east of the hill and up to the top from that direction, he could come on the Jap riflemen from above and route them. However, before this group had even managed to get up on the slope of Hill King, a machine gun opened up and wounded the first two men in column. The position was now fully developed and the battalion commander was informed. It was just at this time that Lieutenant Turpin came back with his patrol and announced that he had contacted G Company and that they were nowhere near Hill King. L Company passed this information to the battalion commander. Time now was 1158. Lieutenant Colonel Mizony ordered I Company to move over to L Company's right and at L Company commander's request, coordinated M Company's 81 mm. mortar platoon with L and I Companies' 60 mm. mortars. All of the light machine guns and the heavies from the platoon of M Company attached to L Company were trained on the forward slope of Hill King. The L Company mortar platoon section leader was to observe and adjust the fire after moving forward and getting into a good position. A Jap sniper wounded him. Another observer was sent forward. The plan - L Company was to move forward, 1st platoon in the lead. Lieutenant Michael Sedmak, the platoon leader, turned to his company commander and said, "That's a tough position and I don't like it". L Company commander said, "Yes, it is, but I'll be right behind you, followed by the 3rd platoon and the rest of the company". Sedmak said, "Fine", and left to orient his squad leaders on the plan.

I Company was to be on the right with the attack time set at 1250. At 1245 a withering fire was laid down all along the forward slope of the hill.

At the end of five minutes, Sedmak jumped off with his 1st platoon moving down from Hill Oboe. Before this platoon had moved forty yards, the Japs on Hill King opened up on the skirmish line with at least two machine guns and an undetermined large number of riflemen. With the mortars and machine guns still firing and with his own men laying down fire in front of them, the platoon kept pushing ahead by running, by crawling, by taking advantage of rocks and trees for cover.

The commanding officer of L Company moved back and forth along his line pushing the men forward. At the end of ten minutes this one platoon had the following men killed: Pfc. Thomas G. Hill, Pfc. John Miner, Pfc. Robert C. Peters, Pfc. Donald M. Ratcliff and Pvt. Martin B. Otten. Pfc. Vincent J. Occhipinto was mortally wounded and 17 other men were wounded and evacuated including Sedmak and his platoon sergeant. Out of this whole platoon only the 2nd squad was left except for two men on the extreme left flank of the 1st squad, and one man on the extreme right of the 3rd squad. In the center of the line only the company commander was not hit, although, according to his men, he was the most exposed man in the line.

The nature of this sharp but final piece of action can be seen by studying how the six men were killed. Hill was killed as he dived for a hole to get out of the line of fire of the machine gun. He got to the hole all right, but a sniper was waiting for him in a tree just above the hole and killed him as he hit the prone position. Miner found a hole without being hit, but when he got to it he found Pfc. Stephen Witkowski in it, badly wounded. He tried to give Witkowski aid, but in doing so exposed a shoulder and was hit. He then tried to get back to the jump off point to an aid man, but in doing so was hit three or four more times and finally killed. Peters was hit as he advanced and fell into a hole with Lieutenant

Sedmak. He watched his chance to get back out of the hole and finally managed to scamper back a few yards to a rock where he thought there was some protection. While hiding behind the rock he was hit again and killed. Ratcliff, the company commander's radio operator, was killed instantly while advancing. Otten was killed in much the same fashion as Peters, being hit a second time. (36)

The L Company attempt to advance on Hill King had not stopped. It had simply melted away. The commanding officer soon found himself all alone with none of his assault platoon left. Most of the wounded were lying in holes or hiding behind trees. The two left flank men were well out in front and cut off from any help. They were S/Sgt. William C. Robinson and Pfc. Earvin G. Martin, a scout. The right flank man was close enough to the reserve elements of the company to get back without trouble. The commanding officer of L Company now finding himself virtually alone, made his way back to the rest of the company by dodging from cover to cover and immediately upon reaching it ordered his 3rd platoon to build up a defensive line to keep the enemy from counterattacking and regaining Hill Oboe. In the meantime, Robinson and Martin came back to the line, one at a time, and the wounded men began to crawl back in if they could move at all. After getting his line built up, the commanding officer went way back to the battalion CP and told Lieutenant Colonel Mizony, 3rd Battalion Commander, what had happened. L Company was now in bad shape. The 1st platoon was down to twelve men, and the 3rd platoon which had been hit hard during the explosion of the enemy ammunition dump on 23 June, was not much better off having the same twelve riflemen. The 2nd platoon was nearly intact as was the Weapons and Company headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel Mizony now ordered K Company to relieve L Company on the line. This relief was effected at approximately 1500. (37)

Supply and evacuation became a difficult problem. All wounded were carried or led back over the same rugged trail along the ridge, a movement (36,37) A-6; Personal knowledge.

of approximately 1500 yards to the rear. To venture out into the valley and use the road brought fire, so all supplies were hand carried by the extensive use of pack boards which aided greatly in bringing up necessary rations, water and ammunition to the front line units.

At 0630 on 27 June with L Company in reserve - K and I Company assault units attacked. They were met by a withering fire from the Japs and were halted as on the previous day. The battalion commander now insisted on artillery support from regiment, and it finally was decided to risk putting down an artillery concentration ^{on} Hill King and Hill Able behind it. After some delay for proper coordination, a half hour concentration was put down.

L Company now relieved K Company as they had even less strength than L Company and their last assault had been costly. Both companies moved off cautiously, following as close as possible the artillery preparation. I Company surprised a large party of Japs, among rocks and grass, almost walking into their midst and after many close fights cleaned them out. (38) This whole area showed many Japs dead, four machine guns bent and twisted, small arms along the trail and cartridges scattered around. The artillery had been effective in disclosing that the entire hill was covered with small, interlocking caves and well fortified.

The order was now given to pivot left and go down the ridge into the valley. This order was given at 1150 and execution of it was begun immediately. Lieutenant Colonel Mizony now ordered the machine guns and mortars of I, L and M Companies to move up on Hill King to put down neutralizing overhead fire on Hill Able which the Japs now had organized. (See Map C) G Company, 165th Infantry on the right of the battalion, had not yet moved into position to attack this hill, and, rather than hold up his whole advance, the battalion commander elected to neutralize this strongpoint with fire.

Both companies maintained their same alignment. L Company, which had (38) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lieutenant Robert Smith.

achieved the top of the hill without trouble, pivoted in place with the 2nd platoon, under Lieutenant Turpin, in the assault. I Company swung in a wide arc to the left with its 3rd platoon, under Lieutenant Bonner, moving its right flank right up under the sheer cliff that marked the face of Hill Able. The combined fire of the machine guns, placed directly on the top of this hill kept the enemy from moving across its crest and dropping grenades down onto Bonner's men.

The terrain to the battalion front was now a steep slope down to the valley. Most of this descent was through thick high tufts of grass, and numerous rocks, to a point fifty yards west of the road. Here the assault ^{Rout} would enter a cane field, push through it to a grassy area which led to the battalion objective line. From the beginning of the cane field to the house at the top of the ridge where the battalion would reorganize the ground sloped gradually uphill. Along L Company's left flank ran a line of trees. Directly to the battalion front, although almost a thousand yards away, were the cliffs of Mt. Tapotchau. The whole side of the up grade to the objective was open to fire from both Hill Able, on the battalion's right rear, and to frontal fire from Tapotchau. (See Map C)

Directly in front of L Company almost at the road, there was another little wrecked concrete house nestled in a tiny banana grove. Before pushing down into the open from Hill King, L Company commander instructed Lieutenant Turpin to send out a squad to clean out this house. Turpin immediately dispatched a squad under S/Sgt. Cyrus W. Shelhammer to investigate the house. This was a nine man squad and was accompanied by Turpin himself. They crept down to the house cautiously and upon arrival there grenaded it and poured rifle fire all over the inside, result 3 dead Japs. As the platoon began to move on beyond the house into the cane, heavy fire of all types began to pour into the area, particularly mortar. This fire seemed to come from Hill Able, from Tapotchau, and from the line of trees along the company's left

flank. L Company commander immediately called Lieutenant Colonel Mizony by radio, told him of the situation, and Mizony contacted Lieutenant Noakes of K Company and ordered him to move his company in on L Company's left flank and see if he could clean out the sources of enemy fire in the trees. Meanwhile, Turpin with his platoon was inching forward into the cane field still receiving heavy fire. The time was now 1345. The rest of L Company, the 3rd and 1st platoons, in that order, both skeleton platoons, barely more than a full squad each in strength, now pushed down into the cane in column. The fire had not caused any casualties in the leading platoon up until that time and Lieutenant Turpin, after studying the situation carefully, decided that he could work across to the objective in spite of it. He, therefore, ordered his three squad leaders to move their units off, one at a time, and to run in short fast bounds toward the objective. At arrival there, the platoon would reorganize in the protection of the house located in the center of the valley on a small ridge. Turpin himself led the first squad as it moved out. These men, nine in number, now started a rapid advance out of the cane field. Moving at a fast low crouch by bounds, the men moved as individuals. Within twenty minutes Lieutenant Turpin arrived at the house on top of the hill and a moment later was joined by Sergeant Frank H. Riordan, leader of the 1st squad. It was five minutes before any of the rest of the squad got up, and then they all arrived one by one. These nine men were joined a moment later by Lieutenant Bonner of I Company and four of his men. These fourteen men now held the hill alone for over an hour while the rest of the battalion was lying in the field behind them unable to move up. Riordan and Turpin, the first two men on the hill, had immediately "organized for a counterattack". Turpin reports that the first thing Riordan said to him when he arrived on the scene was, "What'll we do, Turp, Organize for a counterattack?". At 1447 I Company who had a working radio, got hold of battalion and reported the situation.

They were ordered to dig in and hold. (See Map C) (39)

(39) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lieutenant Wilbert Turpin

Meanwhile, the rest of the two assault companies behind them had run into a great deal of fire. The fire which was heavy when Turpin left, became progressively heavier. The Japanese used mortars, machine guns and fire from at least one heavy flat trajectory weapon. In L Company, Turpin's second squad started out from the bottom of the hill, intending to swing along the line of trees to a point directly south of the objective and then run the 150 yards up the hill to where Turpin was. Moving out five minutes after the 1st squad, this group of men moved only fifty yards and then ran into an open space swept by a heavy cross fire from the left and from Hill Able. When they tried to infiltrate across this open knob of ground, they were pinned to earth by fire and finally the 2nd squad leader ordered his men to pull back and return to the point from which they started. The third squad of the 2nd platoon saw what happened to the 2nd squad and moved off on the route followed by Turpin. This squad of five men got to within fifty yards of the house on top of the hill and then became pinned down. The squad leader, a Pfc., kept his men crawling forward however, and within half an hour of tortuous work they finally joined the small group on top of the hill. (40)

While the other two rifle platoons and the mortar section of the Weapons platoon were waiting their turn to leave the cane field and move out into the open, the Japs suddenly opened up with a terrific barrage of mortar shells into the area where the men were lying. This barrage wounded three of the men in the Weapons platoon and when one of the company's aid men moved over to give these men aid, he was shot through the head and killed. The mortar fire scattered most of L Company's men over a wide area and it now became impossible to move forward until the company was reorganized. This task was undertaken by the L Company commander who now moved throughout this fireswept area collecting the men from his own company, and from I and (40) Personal knowledge; L Company History

K Companies. At the end of an hour's time he had organized a line from remnants of all three companies and placing himself at the head, pushed on forward to the area occupied by Turpin, Bonner and the others. The advance was a steady forward movement, taking advantage of all cover and moving by bounds.

I Company had adopted the same method of advance used by Turpin, squad rushes, but only Bonner and his party managed to get through to the ridge which was the company objective. The rest of the company, as it waited to advance, was caught in the heavy mortar barrage and scattered to all parts of the cane field. In the heavy fire that swept the area two noncommissioned officers were killed and six men wounded including the new company commander, Lieutenant Robert Smith. This last casualty left I Company with no officer leadership, Lieutenant Bonner having reached the objective and being cut off from the rest of the company. The death of these two noncommissioned officers left I Company with very few ranking noncommissioned officers left. With the company badly scattered and with no recognized leaders, I Company had ceased to be a cohesive unit. It was for this reason the L Company commander stepped in and took command of this company along with his own. Lieutenant Smith had been the third commander of this company since 26 June. Lieutenant Bonner assumed command of I Company that night as soon as L Company commander had reorganized it along the battalion objective. (41)

K Company it will be remembered, had been ordered into the line on L Company's left. They had no sooner come abreast of the L Company line than they too, were brought under the heavy fire which by now was general throughout the valley floor. However, the men were in a better position to return the fire and concentrated on laying down a heavy volume along the line of trees. Their fire succeeded in knocking out two enemy machine gun positions in the line of trees. (42)

(41) Personal knowledge; Notes of Captain Edmund Love (42) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lieutenant Noakes.

The 3rd Battalion units had reached the objective along the ridge in the vicinity of the house by 1530. L Company commander immediately ordered the men to dig in. He ordered I Company to dig in on his right and K Company on his left, both companies bending back to join in his rear. He then called battalion, told them his situation, and asked for tank support and litter bearers to be sent out to him. At that time all three companies were badly in need of ammunition. The light machine gun sections of both I and L Companies and the heavy machine guns of M Company were still back on the side of the Purple Heart Ridge. The wounded were given first aid by the aid men, who were doing a splendid job of patching up. It was almost impossible to leave the position and evacuate the wounded. It also became apparent that supplies could not be brought in to the position.

Five medium tanks arrived ^{at} approximately 1730. They took up fire on Hill Able where most of the Jap's effective fire was hitting the companies. After a half hour of support, the tank commander requested permission to return. L Company commander called battalion before releasing them, battalion assented to the request. L Company commander then requested of the tank leader to leave all his small arms ammunition and water he had in all his tanks. The tank commander issued orders to that effect and dumped the ammunition and water on the ground. This supply proved ample and the companies now had sufficient ammunition plus a half cup of water per man. The tanks were then loaded with 25 seriously wounded men. This was done in an area which had a deep dip in the ground free from fire, and then were evacuated through the machine gun and rifle fire infesting the valley to an aid station. This problem of the wounded had considerably worried the L Company commander, as it had been impossible to evacuate the wounded due to the heavy enemy fire between the battalion CP and the companies' positions.

At approximately 1800 some of the elements of the 2nd Battalion began

to arrive and take up positions on the right and rear of the 3rd Battalion - companies E, H and later G. After a conference with each of the various company commanders, all units dug in for the night. None of these companies in the 2nd Battalion had any rations or water although both had a good supply of ammunition. They had been following the 3rd Battalion all day ready to take up positions when the 3rd Battalion moved into the valley.

About this time the machine guns of the companies left on the hill began receiving heavy counter fire. ^{The} Battalion commander ordered them to withdraw to the CP for the night. This decision was made rather than expose the guns to capture by the enemy.

not shown
G Company, 165th Infantry had great trouble with Hill Able. After killing approximately 35 Japs in a hand to hand fight, they rested for the night also. This Jap strength on Hill Able caused the decision to withdraw the battalion machine guns from their position. (43)

As night fell, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions' position was none too good. They were flanked on both sides by high ground which was still occupied by enemy who were well armed and in almost inaccessible positions. Hill Able was especially dangerous; it was a high, crag-like rock from which the enemy had perfect observation and fields of fire covering the whole valley. It rested directly on the battalions' flank giving perfect enfilade fire for all types of weapons.

Hill Able, it was learned later, was one of the key defense points for the first field command post of Lieutenant General Saite, the Japanese Commander on Saipan. General Saite had picked the place because of its natural defenses. This position was originally held by one full battalion of the 136th Japanese Infantry Regiment with one field piece. There is no definite figure on the number of Jap defenders on Hill Able on the morning of 27 June. (44)

(43,44) Personal knowledge.

Because of the relative positions of the attacking forces and the defenders, supply and evacuation had become a serious problem. It was impossible to move across any of the open ground without drawing fire from Hill Able or the cliffs of Tapotchau. What supplies were brought in were carried by tanks. Vehicles traveling any of the roads through the valley had to travel at breakneck speed. Although the 106th Infantry had moved through Death Valley, they had not yet conquered it.

One other factor had now entered the picture in the 3rd Battalion, 106th Infantry. This unit had borne the brunt of the fighting within the valley. In all three rifle companies casualties had been heavy. Most of the officers were gone, so many in fact that it had become necessary to combine all three of the rifle companies under the command of L Company's commander.

Plans for 28 June called for 2nd Battalion, 165th Infantry operating against Hill Able; 1st Battalion, 106th Infantry operating against Hell's Pocket; 2nd and 3rd Battalions to push on out of Death Valley, first objective to be the ridge line 400 yards to the front. (45)

Daylight on 28 June was shortly after 0500. By 0530 it was light enough to permit the Japanese good observation from both of their vantage points on Hill Able and Mt. Tapotchau. About this time the heavy and light machine guns of each company of the 3rd Battalion arrived at the ridge, providing the support they badly needed. King hour on this morning had been set at 0630, an hour after visibility had become good enough to cause trouble.

The attack order for the 106th Infantry called for an attack to seize the 0-6 line, an objective some 3000 yards to the north, but the regimental commander had ordered his battalion commanders to seize a series of intermediate objectives. The first of those in front of the 106th was a ridge (45) Personal knowledge; Letter from Captain Edmund Love.

line some 400 yards to the front of their position. Upon arrival there, the battalions were to halt, new intermediate objectives would be chosen, and the attack would be resumed. Bitter experience with unexpected terrain obstacles had taught the regimental commander that this was the best method of advance. It gave a chance for terrain study and maneuver. (46)

Between the line which had been held by the 3rd and 2nd Battalions on the night of 27-28 June and the first objective, there was a deep transverse ravine. Little cover was afforded between the two ridges from either Hill Able or Tapotchau, but enemy to the north would have to appear on the crest of the next ridge to put fire on the advancing troops. To forestall this, both battalions left all their machine guns and mortars, including the whole heavy weapons company from each battalion, to deliver intense overhead fire on the next ridge line to deny it to enemy troops.

Artillery had been promised and L Company commander was particularly anxious that this be delivered to his left front along the cliffs of Tapotchau where he expected trouble. Upon presenting fire coordinates however, the artillery mission was denied. He was told that there were Marines in the area where the fire was to fall. This same answer had been given repeatedly for the past five days with the result that none of the troops operating in the valley had any effective fire support save on the morning of 27 June when fire had been put on Hill King.

On this morning L Company commander stood on a ridge from which he had a clear view of all the terrain to his front, and after a careful search of the ground with glasses, he could find no evidence of Marines. He could see them, however, far above, on Mt. Tapotchau itself. He called his artillery forward observer of the 104th Field Artillery to him and asked whether the fire he wanted would endanger the Marines above. The forward observer said not. L Company commander then ordered him to get fire on (46) Personal knowledge.

the position he wanted, one way or another, he didn't care how. The forward observer went to work and prepared a group of firing data for a target far to the right of the position designated. He then called Division artillery, presented them with this data and had the mission approved. He then prepared a second table of coordinates which would place fire where he wanted it. Ten minutes before the preparation began he called the firing batteries, told them there was a mistake in the first coordinates and asked that a second group be used. He then read off his second list. It was recorded by battalion and within a few minutes a perfect artillery barrage was laid down right where the commanding officer of L Company wanted it. Japs came running from the cliff in all directions and most of them were killed. Ten minutes after the 3rd Battalion had jumped off down the slope, Division Artillery called the L Company commander saying they could not fire the mission he wanted. By that time the concentration was all over.

The artillery concentration laid down along the front of the 106th Infantry was extremely effective. As soon as it became daylight, the 2nd Battalion had shifted to the right and built up a skirmish line with E Company on the left and G Company on the right. L Company commander had also arranged all three of his companies on the left of the regimental line with K Company on the extreme left, L Company in the middle and I Company on the right in contact with E Company.

Under cover of the barrage this long skirmish line jumped off promptly at 0630 and moved rapidly down hill to the bottom of the ravine. On the way down they met little trouble, but were slowed up some on the left when it was discovered that the Japs had dug in caves on the forward slope of the hill and were waiting for the men to go by so they could shoot them in the back. The discovery was made in ample time to prevent casualties. Attached engineers moved up and began blowing up the caves as rapidly as possible.

It was not until the line began to move up out of the ravine and out

of the valley that they began to receive fire. There, where the going was slower and our backs were completely exposed to fire, the enemy on Hill Able and Mt. Tapotchau behind us opened up on the advancing line from the rear with everything they had. The effect of this fire was bad all along the line.

G Company on the extreme right moved with its right flank along the road in a northeasterly direction towards the RJ. (See Map C) Only one man in this company was wounded before reaching the top of the ridge which was the objective. He was hit by rifle fire. E Company on the left of G Company, suffered no casualties and I Company, next to them had three men wounded. Both E and I Companies had become involved in cleaning out the caves at the bottom of the hill. L Company, however, suffered much heavier. Two men were mortally wounded as the company pushed up the hill. Two M Company men from the platoon attached to L Company were also killed on the way up, including its platoon sergeant. K Company on the extreme left suffered no casualties.

The advance had been fairly rapid despite the delay at the bottom of the ravine. The men had pushed ahead rapidly keeping a good line, and the battalions reached their first intermediate objective in good style. At approximately 0845 F Company released from the Marines, passed through the rear of the 3rd Battalion and moved into position to the right of I Company.

A little after 0900 supplies came up on tanks which upon appearing on the ridge where the companies were, began to unload and their exposed positions immediately brought fire which now became very intense, including a mortar barrage that inflicted many casualties, including the company commander of I Company - their fourth company commander in three days. The Japs now increased their mortar fire with good accuracy, causing several more casualties. About this time L Company commander checked all three

companies in line and counted ^{the men} them. There were less than 99 men on the line - I Company, 17; K Company, 22 and L Company, 60 effective riflemen. I and K Companies each now had a SCR 536 from L Company plus a SCR 300 radio for control purposes.

The situation was rapidly becoming critical and L Company commander requested the battalion commander to come forward and check the situation on the line, or be given permission to attack. The battalion commander informed him to hold the line. A short time later, the L Company commander again requested permission to move off the ridge, either forward or to the rear, in order to secure better positions for his men. The mortar and rifle fire on this exposed position was causing heavy casualties, particularly in I Company.

Around noon the 3rd Battalion commander displaced forward and with the 2nd Battalion commander checked the terrain to the front in preparation for an advance. They had barely begun their conference, studying the terrain from a vantage point, when a Jap tank poked its nose over the hill 200 yards to the front followed by a second. The first tank directed its fire to the area in vicinity where the battalion commanders were observing and fired his gun at the same time traversing his machine gun from left to right along the ridge line. It did not last more than 10 minutes, when the Jap tanks backed down and disappeared. Casualties were heavy, including the 3rd Battalion commanding officer and M Company commander.

The tanks in the battalion area took up the fire after maneuvering around for a position, but were too late to place effective fire before the Jap tanks went back in to defilade. Almost immediately, the 81 mm. mortars of M Company and the artillery forward observer laid down a heavy concentration of fire in the area where the tanks were seen. A short time later, when going through this area, we found one of the Jap tanks had been hit by this fire.

The battalion received a warning order to the effect, that sometime during the night, 1st Battalion would relieve them. The heavy and fierce fighting of the past five days had caused heavy casualties and the unit needed a rest for reorganization, which, incidently, lasted only two days.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that the initial orientation that battalion and company commanders received did not give enough information on the impending action for the next day, following the relief of the 4th Marine Division.

The Army division commander's sudden receipt of the attack order at 1600 was too late to properly inform regimental and battalion commanders to attack the next morning. Not enough time was allotted to make reconnaissance, terrain analysis, proper estimate of the situation and issue orders. As recall, the Division Commander left Corps Headquarters at 1700 with only two hours of daylight remaining. No reconnaissance is made at night due to Jap infiltration, and any movement after darkness brings fire.

No information was received at Fifth Corps Headquarters or passed down to lower units, regarding the attacks during the preceding afternoon or night which had pushed back the lines of the 4th Marine Division. The knowledge that the 4th Marine Division were meeting heavy resistance would have influenced a commander to put two battalions on the line instead of one as planned. These are all vital points which any commander should have prior to making attack plans.

The many requests for artillery fire which was more often denied than given, due to friendly troops on Mt. Tapotchau, should be better coordinated. Many requests for artillery fire, particularly against the cliffs of Mt. Tapotchau, if fulfilled, would have materially aided the units in the valley. F Company, 2nd Battalion, 106th Infantry which was attached to the 2nd Marine Division on the cliff, could easily be seen or spotted, but even with

F Company's radio assurance of being at a safe distance away, fire was denied by Division Artillery.

The Jap positions on Hill King ^{well} ~~was~~ extremely hard to knock out as they used a spider type underground defensive position, which consisted of a series of trenches connected to a central position enabling the Japs to move quickly from one spot to another, also to keep continually replacing men as fast as they were shot down. (47)

This hill had to be fought for and retaken by two other units after the 3rd Battalion had passed on. If artillery could have been used here at the time of the first attack by L and I Companies, I am sure the heavy shelling would have uncovered and damaged many of these positions more thoroughly. (48)

F Company was sent into the lines on 23 June to maintain contact with the 2nd Marine Division. In order to do this, they had to go to the top of the cliff. The next day they were attached to the Marines and the regiment lost a company and an excellent chance to clean out the cliff positions, which was part of its original mission. Had they stayed with the division, I feel sure that many of the entrenched Jap positions, on the face of the cliff, could have been eliminated and would have assisted the forward movement of the units in the valley, as they demonstrated so effectively on the 28 June. Having been released from the 2nd Marine Division, they came abreast of the battalion on the cliffs and reported they had cleaned out a Jap farm house in the side of the cliff which had been previously blasted by artillery and set up as a fortified position behind the rock emplacement of the building. The Japs had an excellent view of the 3rd Battalion and had raked the entire unit with fire as they advanced into the open valley. (49)

The battalion commander should have been up forward with his units

(47) A-4, p. 36; (48) Personal knowledge; (49) Personal knowledge; Statement of Lieutenant Slade, F Company Commander.

to more effectively control and observe the action. If he had checked the front lines immediately after attaining the objective, on the morning 28 June, he probably would have rendered a quick and decisive decision to get off the exposed ridge, as requested by the L Company commander.

The Division Commander's presence on the front line on 24 June, aided greatly in solving a critical situation and was a great morale factor to all the troops.

The tanks in this operation were not sufficient in number. A platoon in support of each company was actually needed during the entire fight. The terrain was difficult for them and maintenance was high. They had good opportunity to demonstrate their effectiveness against positions on steep hills and cliffs. When darkness came they were very anxious to return to their tank park.

The wide, encircling movements of the 1st and 3rd Battalions to bypass the valley proved costly for the 1st Battalion and an unnecessary march by the 3rd Battalion.

Through Death Valley ran the main highway connecting the Jap naval base at Tanapag Harbor with Aslito Airfield. It was a natural route for a swift thrust by our forces. The enemy fully expected we would land at Magicienne Bay and attempt to use it to cut the island in two and they had prepared for such an emergency by constructing what they thought were impregnable positions in the cliffs of the mountain, overlooking Magicienne Bay and completely covering the broad, open expanse of the vital corridor. They manned it with approximately four thousand men, showing a highly controlled organization, that required each strong point to be thoroughly cleaned out, as well as a determination to carry with them to death as many Americans as possible. (50)

(50) A-1, p. 12.

It had been the most important inland defense of the island. Initially, from the Corps standpoint, the division had held up the advance of the other two Marine regiments whose terrain was rolling and sloping and did not contain the heavy resistance encountered by the division, but from the standpoint of mission accomplished, it was a successful operation as it actually broke, at this time, the Japs' best organized defensive area. They had determined to resist until the last man because the valley loss was a serious blow to their defense, as was demonstrated after the valley was cleared. Then advancement became rapid and the road to Tanapag Harbor cleared. In the fighting of Death Valley, the 3rd Battalion, 106th Infantry had lost its battalion commander, battalion S-2, all its company commanders except one; 5 officers, I Company; 4 officers, K Company; 3 officers, L Company; 3 officers, M Company, out of the battalions total of 27. 17 officers and 224 men wounded and killed during the 5 days of action, most of these men lost were riflemen who form the backbone of the company. In I Company, all the key noncommissioned officers were gone; in K Company, excepting the 1st sergeant, the ranking noncommissioned officer was a sergeant. L Company was in better shape with approximately half of the noncommissioned officers left. Despite the battalion's heavy losses, it had fought well and bravely in one of the bitterest battles of the island. (51)

Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, Commander of the Fifth Corps, viewing the valley scene from the top of Mt. Tapotchau, sent a personal message of congratulation for work well done to the men who had fought in the difficult area. (52)

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Unit commanders must have time for sufficient reconnaissance. In many instances, orders were issued late at night for attacks at daylight.

(51) Personal knowledge; (52) A-1, p. 13.

2. Information as to the location of friendly troops on the line of departure should be more carefully checked so that units sent in to relieve organizations do not find it necessary to fight their way up to the line of departure.

3. A great deal more infantry-tank training is indicated. A better system of communication is essential. At least one tank in each platoon should be equipped with a flame thrower.

4. A mutual understanding between the various services is necessary to recognize and understand the different methods used by each in their training and use of arms in combat.

5. The pack board proved to be of extreme value in carrying supplies over difficult terrain.

6. The additional BAR in each squad of one company added real fire power to that unit and, incidentally, had the lowest casualty rate.

7. Company radio SCR 300 operators should carry pistols. 536 radios should be increased to 8 per company.

8. Unit commanders must be up forward to control and analyze critical situations.

9. Artillery fire should be closely followed, as the Japs seemed dazed after a heavy concentration and failed to put up his usual fanatical fight.

10. Caves, regardless of type or location - it is necessary to clear the occupants from each, blow it up or close it by demolitions.

11. When conditions prevent the effective use of supporting fires in dense woods, it is necessary to seek out and kill the enemy, one by one.

12. The Jap soldier is ~~still~~ well trained, brave and willing to fight to the death.